LETS HYBRIDIZE - Harry Goulding

Attaining success today in the fascinating hobby of creating Hibiscus blooms competatively superior is becoming more and more difficult. Competition demands greater perfection. Room in the collectors garden, or the front show table, requires rare combinations of oddity, color, size, and form.

Careful consideration of the selection of parents based on your imaginative visualized progeny is a primary necessity. One good seed pod is more valuable than the old hybridizers years collection grown for the pleasure of creation.

Following this line of proceedure we are quickly stymied by the reticence of the finest blooms to set seed. Can we assume failure is Biological, brought about by continued interbreeding of the best cultivars, or laxity in our attention to the handling of these prima-donnas? Can we improve our proceedure?

Certainly we cannot breach the sterility barrier by changing the chromosome complement, or utilizing embryo culture, or other means available only to the advanced horticulturist, but A H S specialists can observe more carefully the tricks of the trade.

Concerning the stigma receptivity and virility of the pollen, most important are temperature and light. Favorable months are October, November, February, March, and April. Best time of day, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. on cloudy days. Choose blossoms on shady side of plant, or turn blossoms away from the sun. When the pollen sacs first split exposing the pollen to view, is the right time for use. Best temperature is 65 to 80 degrees.

Feeding of the parent plants is very important. Deletion of nitrogen is necessary. A 2-12-12 formula or one of the blossom specials is good. Under heavy feeding of potassium (Potash) many sterile plants will

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throw pseudo pods of unusual size where there is no seed fertilization.

Label all crosses with name of male, date, any pertinant information such as temperature, two day or ice box pollen and compare results.

Harvest pods before they dehisce completely on the plant. Shade air dry. Plant immediately only if weather is warm or temperature controlled. Otherwise store till Spring.

Match boxes are excellent for storage, allowing air protection against mold. Keep away from mice and grandchildren.

Most vital is insect damage causing weak embyro seed pods to abort after fertilization. Many pods are lost because of the tiny white pea weavil. All seed pods should be treated periodically with weak insecticide, while on the plant and before storage.

Your attention is called especially to scarification of the seeds by means of nicking the seed coat with a sharp knife to force early and uniform germination (7 days). Take all precautions against damp-off.

Possibly the best program for success is one of long range. Choose one superlative bloom, you know the one, maybe it is a purple, or that brown, or the fine white you got from the president of X chapter. Cross it both ways, plant all seeds, bloom all seedlings. Then cross back on best seedling with your choice parent. Often a weak seedling when selfed will up grade. Or, take the short road: Bloom quality X strong grower. Your chances of getting a big bloom on a good bush 5,000 to 1. Lets gamble.

To accelerate your program give all seedlings the best possible care. Bloom in 12-14 months is possible with proper soluable feeding, at 10-12 months begin substituting fertilizer without nitrogen intermitantly to induce bloom. And remember a seedling tip lost to an insect sets you back 90 days. Good Luck!